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U.S. Indicates Ex-C.I.A. Officer Helped Soviet Capture a Russian

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 17 — An officer of the Central Intelligence Agency, now a fugitive, may have helped the Soviet Union apprehend a Soviet researcher who was providing American intelligence with valuable military information, Administration officials said today.

The officials said they believed that the former C.I.A. officer, Edward L. Howard, helped the Soviet authorities to arrest the researcher, A. G. Tolkachev, on charges of spying for the United States.

An intelligence source here said Mr. Tolkachev had worked on developing electronics systems for military aircraft. These would, the source said, include radar sets and various other electronic "countermeasures" for deceiving radar searches and jamming radio transmissions.

One Administration official said today that Mr. Howard, who fled the country last month, had been traced as far as Finland and was thought to have crossed into the Soviet Union. He is wanted in the United States on charges of giving the Soviet Union American intelligence secrets.

Last month, in an announcement that was read on Soviet television and distributed to the state-controlled press, the K.G.B., the Soviet intelligence agency, said it had arrested Mr. Tolkachev and accused him of spying.

The announcement described him as a staff member of one of Moscow's research institutes and said he had been caught trying to pass "secret materials of a defense nature" to Paul M. Stombaugh, an official in the American Embassy in Moscow. The statement said Mr. Stombaugh was an officer of the C.I.A. and was expelled by the agency June 14.

'Persona Non Grata' in Soviet

According to an account that appeared in the Soviet Communist Party newspaper Pravda, the K.G.B. said Mr. Tolkachev had been found with "miniature cameras of a special design by means of which he photographed secret documents, as well as means of cryptography, codes, ciphers, quick acting two-way communication radio apparatus and other equipment for espionage work."

Mr. Tolkachev's whereabouts have

not been determined. He "disappeared," an intelligence source said.

A spokesman for the Central Intelligence Agency declined to comment. At the State Department, a spokesman confirmed that Mr. Stombaugh, who was a second secretary of the United States Embassy in Moscow, had been declared "persona non grata" by the Soviet Union, but the spokesman would not discuss allegations by the K.G.B.

Mr. Howard was hired by the C.I.A. in 1981, according to court papers filed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Officials have said he was trained to be posted to Moscow and given access to sensitive information about American intelligence-gathering in the Soviet capital.

Mr. Howard was forced to resign from the C.I.A. in 1983 after a polygraph, or lie detector test, indicated that he had used drugs and engaged in party theft.

Officials said today that an earlier polygraph examination, administered when Mr. Howard joined the agency, had found that he had previously tried "recreational" drugs. The officials said such a history of casual drug use would not preclude employment at the C.I.A. provided the employee was no longer using drugs and did not lie about it.

C.I.A. Defends Actions

Meanwhile, a senior Central Intelligence official defended the agency's handling of the Howard case, while declining to be publicly identified. He said that Mr. Howard's espionage was uncovered when the agency arranged the defection of Vitaly Yurchenko, a high-ranking K.G.B. official. Mr. Yurchenko, officials have said, was responsible for the K.G.B.'s American operations while he was serving in the Soviet Embassy here from 1975 to 1980.

"It was our efforts that found the guy, we got the defector, we busted the case, we fired Howard," the C.I.A. official said. "What were we supposed to do?"

He said Mr. Howard was the only Soviet agent with C.I.A. ties to be identified by Mr. Yurchenko. "So one guy turns out to be a bad apple," the official said. "That the only one I know of that the defector has identified and he was in a position to know if there were others."